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IN THE RED YEARS



George
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IN THE RED YEARS

A Book of Verse

BY

GERVÉ BARONTI ✓
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BOSTON

THE FOUR SEAS COMPANY

1917

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IN THE RED YEARS

THE RED LAUGH

Arch friend of all dark worlds that be
Whose poisoned breath blows scorching o'er
Fair lands of late prosperity
Deep irrigated now with gore.

You call our strong, who hear the cry,
And join your wretched, bloody play.
A grimy rag you wave on high
And madly lead them on the way.

Their hearts are closed, their reason gone,
Through reddened mist they cannot see;
They groping, stumble wildly on
Engaged in vile absurdity.

You call the game, each takes his stand,
The prizes differ with your mood.
Some drag a leg, an arm, a hand
Of modeled wax or clever wood.

Move follows move, one side must flee,
With blood-drunk lust its losses tell;
Your mocking laugh is raised in glee,
The sound reverberates in hell!

CHAINS — —

The metallic dirge
Strikes on the ear of night
Soul-paralyzing!
Dreaded, mysterious, demon-wrought!
Clank clank clank
Rattle rattle rattle
It slides and slips
Thump thump thump
The accompaniment of the iron ball.
The hell-forged iron ball.
Clank clank clank
On goes the weird air,
Rattle rattle rattle—
Pause drag drag— —
Drag fainter, fainter—
Rattle rattle rattle
Pause.
Hollow monotonous—
Dying away, away—
Fainter fainter
Drag, pause
Ceasing
Rattle again, rattle—rattle
Clank clank
Drag

Rattle—
Pause—
Rattle—
Throughout the night.

It will cease with the dawn—
The clanking—
The dragging—
The chainy death rattle—
The metallic death rattle—
For it is a dirge of the night,
The night that is long.

Dawn will bring peace, rest, liberation—
But the dawn is not yet—
Not yet—

WORSHIPPERS

Stone upon stone
Forms the edifice.
Imprisoned here and there
Between the stones
Are patches of color.

Fools! You can't catch the soul-stuff
Of the red, green and violet
That glowed at you first
Across the dull nothingness.

Inside the edifice
The husks are waiting.
The husks with the dead interiors,
Waiting for the one husk
That is placed before a ribbed object
To evoke its turbulent life
And disturb the calm.

What sounds does it hold,
The ribbed object,
Under its bone-dry ribs?
Does it hold a sound of joy,
Of love, of mirth, of pity, of fury,
Of anything that is outside the edifice?

Does it hold the sound
Of the flowers bursting into life?
Does it hold the sound
Of the trees rocking the birds to sleep?
Does it hold the sound
Of the forest king's warning to all lesser life?
Does it hold the sound
Of the winter ocean striking the wall of the
ice-berg?

Does it hold any sound that is real,
Any sound that is a natural sound?
Does it hold one note of truth?
No:—Truth is outside the edifice—
Where the husks should be!

One husk is standing
Facing the others
With its arms extended.
Listen: with its mechanical voice
It is consecrating all the other husks
To God.

TO THE IDEALIST

Oh, You who peace and love extol,
Know you the complex wilful soul!

The fight to make red hate expire,
The wish to throttle mean desire,
The greed that comes from love of wealth,
The chase of pleasures marring health,
The lust that oft desires to kill,
The leash too weak to rein in will,
The voice that heralds others' shame,
The trick to tarnish a fair name,
The days that haply take the best,
The nights that laugh at day's behest,
The hours when life seems fashioned good,
The moments jeering at this mood,
The hope that when these storms are past
The clear white light will shine at last.

HOW I LOVE—

The wild deep-furrowed face of nature
When her expression is tempestuous and severe,
The wind blowing in high places,
The mad in-rushing dash of the sea
When it leaps to fiercely embrace the shore,
The cold salty spray that strikes my face like a whip,
The startled scream of the wild birds,
The snarling growl of the animals—my brothers,
The hot white heat of the noon sun,
The dark jewelled sky of midnight,
The free defiant laughing cataract,
The great first places that man has not spoiled,
The fresh-scented earth upturned by the plough,
The oozy slimy mud in the bed of the brook,
The crawling squirming creatures who inhabit it,

The City at night when every one is sleeping,
The pæan of the rain outside my window,
The men who dare to be honest with women,
The men with the gift of silence,
All who have learned the great lesson of tolerance,
Virtue that carries no placard,
Vice that is stalwart, courageous, and ambitious,
All these I love.

And I hate
The coward who links arms with regret,
The weakling who leans on atonement,
The weak-kneed charity of the ultra-respectable,
The sterilized vice of the hypocrite,
All who obey too easily.

THE COWARD

I cannot follow where you lead,
O man of science deep ;
At your cold feast I dare not feed,
Because I wish to keep
The thought of God.

I cannot list your pregnant speech,
Your arguments profound,
The proven facts you hope to teach,
For to my soul is bound
The fear of God.

I cannot glance your written page
So radical and bold,
These arts you've used in every age ;
Still in my heart I hold
The love of God.

ECHOES

I see a field of golden rye
As the red sun forsakes the sky.
The fruited heads upon their stem
Nod as the wind blows over them.

Southward, and to the right, is seen,
Beyond that stretch of waving green,
The empty house of ancient style,
Of mouldering brick and rain-washed tile.

Beneath its vines of rank decay,
Its rust-gnawn shutters fall away.
Old house, I worship you again.
You were my haunted castle—then.

Inside, but not for children's sight,
The fairy queen once came at night.
She brought with her a merry band
Of all good fairies in the land.
Throughout the night they'd dance and sing
To instrument like violin.
To bed we'd go to wake at dawn
And watch them leave in early morn.
But strange, they always stole away
And never came to dance by day.

This olive shade I cannot pass,
'Twas here I loitered in the grass
And gazed intently at the blue
And wondered long if God were true,
And if one angel from the crowd
Might fly quite low beneath a cloud.

Yon crescent-shapèd, lazy sea,
To think of all you meant to me!
Far down beneath your depths so green
The mermaid's crystal home was seen.
In cradle shells all pearly lined
The lovely mermaid babes reclined.
If one could dive down very deep,
Into the palace he might creep.
At night the sea would gently moan
With echoes from that hidden home,
And on the beach the goat-bells toll,
Timed with the fisher's barcarolle.

And now I gaze familiarly
On this fair land and placid sea,
Whose beauty is enhanced; and yet,
Somehow I see them with regret.

THREE AMULETS

And a tale is told by the desert men
Of a certain Sheik who came once again,
 With luminous eyes and bold,
How he brought the gift, one amulet more,
And away to his desert home he bore
 The creature of white and gold.

She sat gazing out on the burning sand,
And dreamed of a Sheik in that pagan land,
 Who'd call at the edge of the night,
With his final gift, an amulet rare,
And asked for the maid with the sunny hair
 Whom he meant to purchase right.

Two gifts he had left with never a word
And if she accepted—then with the third
 He would claim the maiden's hand;
And bear her away to his tribal place
As chief of his wives for a certain space
 In that languid, sun-washed land.

The tale is as old as the desert clan:
How the wooing is done by the Arab man
 When he offers gifts, just three,

In silence: and then with a haughty mien
He later returns to take his queen
With the tribe formality.

She looked at the amulets—Horus' eyes,
And she thought of her child's brief paradise
With those other eyes of fire.
She thought of her home, of her early life,
The struggles and cares and maddening strife,
And then of her heart's desire—

She thought of that step with compelling fate
Just off to the left of the path that's straight,
Taken blindly long ago.
Life's flame had smouldered and flickered since then
With each futile attempt to place again
New hopes on its fading glow.

And she thought of a home beyond the sea
Far from expressions of sympathy
That accused, while proff'ring cheer.
For friends who would welcome, and never know
That an aching soul was transplanted to grow
Away from a constant fear.

The shadows were lengthening along the sand
That prelude the night in that mystic land,
The west was a crimson flame—
When out of the twilight as twice before
In dusty haste to her flower-trimmed door
A lone Arab rider came.

And the tale is told by the desert men
Of a certain Sheik who came once again,
 With luminous eyes and bold,
How he brought the gift, one amulet more,
And away to his desert home he bore
 The creature of white and gold.

THE SEARCHER

The old man knelt on the sand
Before a pile of debris
At which he clawed with wasted fingers.
He was bent with the sorrows of many winters.
On his wrists were the marks
Left by the old manacles.
But in his eyes shone the light of emancipation.
He was very old—this searcher.
Diligently and faithfully,
He removed piece after piece,
From the pile of debris.
He examined each piece
Before tossing it aside.

When the last piece
Had been removed from the pile,
His eager eyes sought the sand beneath
Which he pushed restlessly from side to side.
Then taking into his hands
Portions of the sand,
He watched it slip through his fingers,
And return to the pile.

Long hours he kept to his task,
For he knew that he would find them—
The gems he sought.
Others had passed the pile of debris,

And had kicked it gently, very gently,
With the slight force
That does not loosen—
They had not stooped to examine,
For into their eyes had not yet come
The light of emancipation.
From their hands had not yet fallen
The manacles.
The old searcher thought of the others,
As he watched the sand
Slip through his fingers.
And he laughed sadly;
And the sound was like the wind
Blowing through hollow caves.

The twilight was creeping up behind him
Slowly; with noiseless tread,
Soon it would be too dark
To search in the sand.

Then presently he felt the rough edges
Of that which he sought,
And knew it was a jewel.
There must be other jewels,
But it was now very dark,
And he must wait for the light
Of another day.
Slowly and stiffly he rose
From his kneeling posture.
He glanced at the pieces of débris

Which he had thrown to one side
As he uncovered the sand beneath
Where the treasure was hidden.

The others would pass in the morning,
Would they see—dared he hope?
If only they would see—the others.
But into their eyes
Had not yet come
The light of emancipation.
From their hands had not yet fallen,
The manacles.

He laughed again,
That old hollow, broken laugh.
A laugh that was the wailing echo
Of all the misery in the world—
A laugh far sadder than any tears—
Tears might fall later—perhaps
The bruised pearls of a benediction.
Darkness was all about him.
He turned and walked away
From the scattered debris
That made ghostly pictures
In the gathering shadows.
On he walked, thinking always of the others.
On past the old swamp
Where grew the beautiful purple lilies,
That carried their roots far down
Into the dark damp earth.

TO A. C. S.

Oh thine eyes that saw the beauties,
In the regions, where the soul,
Flashing through the nights of darkness
Found the daybreak of the whole!

Oh thine ears so loved by nature,
That her poignant hands did seek,
Soft to brush with magic fingers,
Till they heard the flowers speak.

Oh thy lips that meekly opened
For thy hidden song to flee
And enrich the world forever,
As it voiced the Christ in thee!

THE STORM

[*In collaboration with A. J. S.*]

'Tis storm and tempest within the deep.
The raging seas beat a fiercely rhythmic and throated
music.
No moment's calm assuages their torrential to-and-fro.
Across uncharted space roll laboring waters keeping
time with wandering winds.
Their pilot is a fleet of waves shaped like a mighty
myriad-branched tree stretched on the face of
the deep.
As the pilot hews onward through the rocking breakers
Vapors from rebellious waters mount the silence-pin-
naced firmament and challenge the languid
loneliness of space.
Then as they rise higher some are choked by frigid
currents.
In panicky fright the clouds retreat on a long swift
incline,
Led by the enskied jewels of the night,
The galaxy of moon and stars.
When a vanguard of clouds rejoin their rightful
element,
The happy waters dance in the light of the skies.
Adown the cataract of the air the rear-guard hurries
in might-restrained chase,

For the enlivening communion of sea and cloud.
The fruit of their union is turbulent unrest,
The thrill of which each passes to the other,
Until the branches of the piloting tree moan with rebellion against the even tenor of their movement.

Each spire of cloud and wave of water
Communicates to the other the meaning of that unrest,
which from itself it withholds.

And now the mighty heart of the earth vibrates
And the dark depths convulse with the terror of the Arch-destroyer.

"We will shake and break the earth and sky-barriers
That God has imposed on us
When in a moment of forgetfulness
We winked away our vigil."
So shouted the outlying waters;
And in a shrill tone the branches of the moving tree
whistled an answer.

"We will break the barriers which Man, the haughty,
earthly-heavenly child, has been allowed to
fashion.

He has spanned us in a bondage of bridges,
And now in his unsated pride
He plans to draw from us each atom of energy
As he has drawn from his Mother Earth."

With one huge effort,
Echoing through the frame of the universe,

The trunk of the tree forced the unruly branches to be
silent

And to smite into silence the grumbling voices,
And the sea was covered with foam caused by the
haste of the vanquished.

Then through vast space was audible a majestic voice:

Man is heart of my heart and life of my life.

He has assisted the melting of my sculptured icebergs,
My own architected pyramids.

He has changed the course of my rivers.

He has made the earth to articulate with seething life
and triumphant labor,

The earth, that branch, which in a cosmic catastrophe
was torn from my body.

It is I who urge him now to bridle the seas,

To harness the winds,

To scale space,

To reclaim my lost planets.

He lives for me, and I live in him.

WAITING — —

I saw you in that Temple old
 Lead priestly train with slow advance,
Your hands outstretched to Merodach.
 I dared not raise to you a glance.

When in the greatest Pharaoh's troops
 I saw your mystic face again
You laid a siege—but to my heart—
 And took me willing captive then.

I still recall the buried day
 With memory I've carried o'er,
Our home beneath the desert palm,
 Our life upon the Theban shore.

While Athens with the laurel crown
 Paid homage to her mighty men,
You watched with weary, sated mien
 Your happy dancing slave-girl then.

With the masonic Socrates,
 If virtue be but Knowledge true
You did discuss; and failed to see
 The burning flame that leaped to you.

Across the Pincian Hills you gazed,
As the immortal city passed
With mournful dirge. Your vision cleared
And saw your soul revealed at last.

To the cathedral's lofty walls
Your shaded pane, with note of rest,
Came to admit the only light,
The Christ-child at his mother's breast.

Adown the isle the other day
I saw your black-robed form advance,
With eyes downcast and folded hands
I dared not raise to you a glance— —

THE YELLOW ROOM

I stand here alone
Beneath her window.
The wind scarcely breathes.
The youthful spring sky
Seems expressionless.
Oh, for something to match my suffering!

I followed Death
Into the yellow room.
I was too late.

How this Spring landscape tortures,
Serene and immature,
As an unfolded bud.

Oh, that yellow room!
Pale jonquil-studded horror!
Pale yellow everywhere;
The walls, the floor, the hangings,
The window-panes
That caught the reflection
Of the distant sun;
The high draped bed
That held the body,—
Once the restless vehicle

Of her will.
And I followed Death
Into the yellow room,
But I was too late.

Oh, why did she not wait!
I would have told her
Another way.
Oh why, why, why
Did she not wait!
Poor pale yellow soul.
Oh why did she not wait!
I would have told her
Another way.

TRIAD

Oh send me Pain, if it must be
On torture's scroll my eyes shall see
 The story written there.
My troubled soul still striving gropes
Its way through darkness—seeking Hope's
 Answer to the prayer.

Oh send me Love—if pain it be,
If heartache and uncertainty
 Are fuel for the fire.
Oh drain my life—'tis not in vain
If joy but faintly tinge the pain
 When this is Love's desire.

Oh send me Death that I may see
The beauty in the mystery
 When beaten hope has fled.
For only light from flame divine
Can feed this famished soul of mine
 When fire-bred love lies dead.

DREAM ISLES

They are not found near coral reefs,
Nor in far polar seas,
Those magic isles the spirit knows,
Those isles the spirit sees.

No chart can show the waking eye,
Nor to the mind unfold
Where dark green waters gently lave
Those shores of molten gold.

No wandering breeze can bring to us
The brilliant bird's soft note,
That, to the spectre of a palm,
Breathes from its mellow throat.

GOOD-BYE, SWEET CHILD

The jonquil gave her golden glint
To gild your silken hair,
The purple iris, for your eyes
Bequeathed her color rare,
The lily on your velvet cheek
Her petal white uncurled,
Sweet flow'r, you were too fair to bloom
In the garden of the world.

BEFORE A NUDE

Rare skill hath drawn o'er hidden fires,
And made this wondrous form to glow.
So deftly clothed, it peace inspires.
Yes, nude thou art, but naked—no!

BROWN EYES

Sweet eyes of brown,
Dear eyes that saw the temple built
And watched the pyramids arise
Were just such eyes.

Sweet eyes of brown,
Blest eyes that from the manger gazed,
With ardent fire of high emprise,
Were just such eyes.

Sweet eyes of brown,
Faith's eyes that knew the marble cold
Could glow with life so magic-wise,
Were just such eyes.

Sweet eyes of brown,
Hope's eyes that looked while canvas dim
Took color for our late surprise,
Were just such eyes.

Sweet eyes of brown,
Love's eyes the soul is leaning through
To catch the light as mine replies,
Are just such eyes.

PETALS

We crush the petals in our hands,
Those of the vivid hue,
For fields are green, and life is young.
Behold, the sky is blue!

The petals flutter from our hands,
So brown and sere they fall;
For fields are bare and sky o'ercast.
Just withered petals,—all.

PASSION FLOWERS

Sweet passion flowers at my feet in the grass,
By the amorous south wind fanned,
Your fragrance is wafted to me as I pass,
Why take you to die in my hand?

Fair earth-stars designed by a Hand which is sure,
You beacon; are we to contemn?
Your roots are concealed—more the colors allure.
Sweet blossoms—just die on the stem!

MORNING SONG

Stretched 'neath a tree on your moss-trimmed mantle,
Watching the sun come out of the sea,
Feeling your deep heart beneath mine throbbing,
Mother, I come to thee.

Listening the leaves' low gentle humming
Attuned to the wind's rare melody
Taken from over the mystic border—
Mother, to sing to thee.

Violet, yellow, and crimson blossoms
Have massed themselves in your soft green hair;
And dew has emptied her jewel casket—
Mother, oh thou art fair!

A BEAR FACT

*Suggested by Georges Musaphia's painting of nude
and bear.*

On a planet of topaz and crystal,
Where ice-elves and fairies abound,
Where suns' rays are filtered through gossamer,
The girl of my dreams I have found.

She bewilders, entices and beckons,
I watch her enraptured, soul-freed,
While the amber light's gentle caresses
Race round her soft limbs and recede.

The ambrosial hills' matchless beauty
Brushed o'er by her flame-colored hair,
Is a feast for the gods delectation,
And only enjoyed by a *bear*.

TO NATALIE

Sweet maiden with the long deep eyes,
How came you with us now?
We see those eyes in Nephthys' face
Below the narrow brow.

THE PLAY

First Shade...Are you going in to see the play?

Second Shade...Yes, wait while I check my soul.

First Shade...I will keep mine.

Second Shade...You won't need it.

First Shade . . . Do you know the playwright?

Second Shade...Yes, he is late of the earth.

First Shade...What is the piece, comedy or tragedy?

Second Shade... Travesty.

First Shade...And he calls it—

Second Shade...Love.

THE CALL

The helpless are calling to me.
Their voices are raised in despair.
Their hands are extended in anguish.
I must pass on.

The hopeful are singing to me.
Their voices are raised in gladness.
Their hands are extended in blessings.
I *can* pass on.

I hear the call of the helpless.
O God, allow me to linger!

GODDESS NEITH

[*"Goddess Neith" is a friend who has the love and knowledge of Egyptology.*]

Fair Goddess Neith, who dost explore
Immortal Egypt's hidden lore,—
The art She buried deep in sand
To wait for thy resourceful hand
To find again and bring to light
And teach the West Her ancient might.

Her luxury of pagan mold,
Her treasures vast, and darkened gold,
Her script which shows to eyes like thine
Her steady march to heights sublime,
Her scarabs rare, most lovingly
She set aside and marked for thee.

Dost think Her moon is on the wane?
Dost fear She will not shine again?
And hasten late Her steps to stay
From oblivion's woeful day?
O Goddess, heed this certainty:
She cannot pass. She lives in thee.

SKETCHES

Old earth reels and sways
And wheels and whirls
To the Mirth-mad time:
For in the nether spaces
The blue flame roars and hisses
The music of the dance.

The moon's gold has changed
To palest silver,
A stretch of smoky amber
Flings itself
Along the east.
Fresh morning breeze
Hurries from the hills
To strip the night garment
From the drowsy sea.
The trees have turned their heads
To watch the sun get up.
The amber stretch
Is now a field of gold
Grown over
With great fleecy flowers.
The waves have put white ruffles on
And dance along the beach.

The snow and rain
Caress and soothe,
But the wind
Saddens,—
It is the deep rumbling
Earth-echo
Of all the gods' despair.

Dear little pool
Left when the rain retired;
How gently the old apple tree
Showers on you scented snow;
You are so small, and yet,
You hold the moon and stars.

See the landscape
Done in crystal!
Nature holds
A pallette strewn
With diamond dust
While she paints
Fairyländ.

Sweet white rose sprinkled with the dew,
How well you play your part!

For who would dream on seeing you
That canker eats your heart.

How lovely these trees are
At all times.
In the Winter
When they stretch their nude arms to Heaven
Like daring wantons,
And beg the frost-king for his crystal jewels.
In the Spring,
Clothed in the first green dress
So faintly perfumed
And trimmed with buds.
Later when the Summer guests arrive
And all is music and merry-making,
How lovely then
In their costume of firmer texture
And deeper dye.
But in the fall,
Arrayed in red and gold
And spangled with ripened fruit
Like giant rubies,
'Tis then that Heaven
Throws between Itself and them,
That smoky, hazy Autumn veil
Lest their beauty be too dazzling.

Beneath the low, dark clouds
The sea is angry.
It roars in frenzy;
Raging billows
Lash the defenseless beach.
Not a sail is seen.
None could live.
Far out
One rock stands firm
Amidst the tumult.
It looks Heavenward
And awaits the later victory—
The reward of calm.

How beautifully this field
Wears these daisies !
Nature's lovely selection
For a brown and green costume.
The birds and butterflies
Pause here
Lost in admiration,
While the gentle south wind
Plays with the white and gold
Bouquet.

Hear the rumble
Of Heaven's drum!
The wind has paused to listen.
Winding down the valley
The green cascade
Of silent trees
Awaits the battle.
The snowy billows
Of the distant mountain range
Hurl themselves on a purple sea.

Nearer sounds the drum.
The apprehensive wind
Begins to grieve,
The green cascade
Sways and groans.
The coming torch
Flashes at intervals
Against the inky blackness.
The drum sounds nearer, nearer—
Hear its dreaded challenge
So faintly answered
By the frightened hills!
How puny seems Earth's wrath
When Heaven is angry!

A dense, dark pall drapes the Autumn sky
In premature mourning;
Below on Earth's charred altar
Piny incense is placed
As a last sad rite
By the passing forest.

What pictures !
Giant birds
With wings of
Burnished copper,
Smiling women
Waving filmy veils,
Ruined castles,
Dense forests,
Snow-clothed mountains,
Oceans of indigo
And deepest green.
All seen through the rain
Of golden sun-beams
This evening.

Twilight trails her purple veil
Across the valley city.
From behind a distant mountain
The sun waves a last
Good-night.
The gentle sighing whispers
Of pines' far-reaching heads
Meet and mingle
With voices of the undergrowth.
The sky has donned her evening dress,
And fastened on her jewels
One by one.
From somewhere in the forest's heart
A lone night bird
Speeds departing day.

O crystal-studded winter night,
Thou'st tranced my mind in vague delight.
I wonder if all things as rare,
As marvelously bright and fair,
Would prove on near approach to be
As hard and cold and chaste as thee!

Thou brazen, glittering wanton of the world,
Flinging at length thy nude sensuous body
Under the full white staring gaze of the sun,
Thy Paramour;

Thou disdainest the green garment of grass or plant,
Thou refusest to drink of the cool singing streams,
Thou parched defiant mysterious beauty,
Sahara.

AWAKENED

I stood in the outer space
Just beyond the threshold.
The sun held back the light,—
Only the moon shone mistily.
There, to the lament of chaos,
I added my tears.

A song reached me from beyond,
With echoes of sweet offering.
A breeze wafted the kiss
Of the sun-warmed
Swaying wind-flowers.

I reached my hands
To release, and music, and sunshine.
One step to the threshold—and over—
To life, to hope and to freedom!
But the sun held back the light,
And only the moon shone
Mistily.

Love, the light is falling around me
That dawn paints
On the face of the Ocean.
The step to the threshold is lighted,
The step to the threshold—and over—
Where the sun-warmed
Swaying wind-flowers
Nod to the voice of the River.

Love, I awake, I awake
And to life, to hope, and to freedom
I add the birth of my laughter.



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